

Sovereign Hedging from the Ottoman Lessons to the Global South's Strategic Resilience

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Abstract: *This paper develops a pluralistic framework for strategic resilience tailored to Global South states confronting great-power rivalry, cascading transnational shocks, and the erosion of multilateral governance. It employs a systematic literature review and a qualitative multi-method design incorporating historical analysis of Ottoman Arab integration and contemporary case studies of the South China Sea and the Russia–Ukraine war. Operational recommendations include regional security pilots, a Global South strategic reserves consortium, joint defence-production pacts, and sustained investment in diplomatic cadres and civil-society track-two networks. Priority areas emphasise sustainable defence practices, food and energy sovereignty, supply-chain diversification, and norm entrepreneurship linking disarmament, development finance, and digital governance. The approach explains how diverse hedging, institutional design, narrative construction, and local capacity-building can reduce dependency while maintaining cooperative diplomacy by combining historical parallels and modern empirical evidence; it offers an actionable policy blueprint enabling Global South actors to translate geopolitical disruptions into durable autonomy, equitable development and resilient peace. Recommendations require transparent governance, rigorous financing mechanisms, accountability metrics and sustained South-South partnerships for long-term strategic impact and moral legitimacy.*

Keywords: *Strategic resilience, Global South, Defence self-reliance, Economic and energy security, South–South cooperation*

Introduction

The nations of the Global South stand in a precarious crucible, forged in the fires of a world order in profound distress. Once relegated to the periphery of great-power machinations, these countries—spanning the vibrant continents of Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Pacific—are no longer mere spectators to geopolitical contests (Freedom House, 2024; Nordics Information, n.d.; World Economic Forum, 2024). Today, they are the primary terrain upon which rivalries are waged and the primary victims of their devastating fallout. The unravelling of the post-Cold War order, characterised by resurgent authoritarianism, a fraying rules-based system, and cascading global crises, has thrust the Global South into a moment of existential strategic reckoning. This is not an abstract academic exercise; it is a desperate scramble for survival, autonomy, and a dignified place in a world where the very institutions designed to ensure peace and prosperity are failing

them. The war in Ukraine, far from a distant European conflict, has become a brutal synecdoche for this new reality—a stark reminder that in a globalised world, the missiles landing in Kyiv trigger bread riots in Cairo and energy poverty in Colombo (Chatham House, 2022; Policy Center for the New South, 2023; United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2022; Vlasova & Zhao, 2024).

The urgency of this moment is quantified in stark human terms. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) warns that the 'polycrisis' stemming from the pandemic, war, and climate change has reversed decades of developmental progress, pushing an estimated 165 million people into poverty since 2020 (UNDP, 2023). For societies already straining under the weight of historical injustices and structural inequities, these shocks are not merely economic data points; they are existential threats that unravel the social fabric, fuel political instability, and erode the hard-won trust in a global compact that seems to offer them little but conditionalities and collateral damage. A telling 2024 survey by the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) revealed that a majority of people in non-Western nations believe the United States and Europe are actively 'contributing to the instability of the global order', with many viewing the Russia-Ukraine war as a 'contest of imperial powers' from which they must strategically distance themselves (ECFR, 2024). This is not neutrality born of apathy, but a calculated stance born of a deep-seated and historically justified scepticism.

The central problem this study confronts is the perilous inadequacy of existing security paradigms for the unique positionality of the Global South. For decades, the dominant choice was a binary one: align with one bloc or another, outsourcing security and, consequently, sovereignty. This model is now bankrupt. The realist pursuit of pure self-help is a luxury few developing states can afford, while the liberal institutionalist promise of a rules-based order rings hollow when the United Nations Security Council remains paralysed by the veto power of its permanent members and international financial institutions are seen as instruments of Western policy (Acharya, 2018). The result is a strategic dilemma of unprecedented scale: how can nations with limited resources, enduring colonial legacies, and acute vulnerability to climate and economic shocks possibly craft a path to sustainable peace and genuine autonomy?

This study argues that the answer lies not in choosing from a menu of tired great-power models, but in a radical, pluralistic, and deeply contextual synthesis. Resilience for the Global South must be reimagined. It is no longer just about hardening military defences; it is about building systemic immunity—a holistic capacity to withstand, adapt to, and recover from the multifaceted shocks of the 21st century. This encompasses everything from food and energy sovereignty to cyber hygiene, from climate adaptation to narrative sovereignty (International Monetary Fund, 2022; World Bank, 2022). It requires learning not only from the failures of the present but also from the sophisticated, if imperfect, strategic models of the past, such as the Ottoman Empire's intricate blend of religious legitimacy and local elite co-optation, which fostered remarkable longevity (Center for Strategic and International Studies, n.d; Masters, 2013).

The importance of this study, therefore, is both diagnostic and prescriptive. It moves beyond lamenting the inequities of the international system to actively blueprinting a future where Global South nations are architects of their own destiny. This study aims to give a cohesive strategic framework by combining insights from realism, liberalism, constructivism, postcolonial critique, and new security studies, as well as rooting its analysis in urgent contemporary flashpoints such as the South China Sea and the Ukraine crisis. It is a call to move from a posture of reactive vulnerability to one of proactive, dignified resilience. In an era where the Global South is increasingly courted for its markets, resources, and votes, this paper provides the intellectual and practical toolkit to ensure that this attention is translated not into renewed dependency but into lasting security, sustainable development, and a truly equitable multipolar world. The stakes are nothing less than the peace and prosperity of the majority of humanity.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, multi-method research design that integrates a systematic literature review of International Relations and foreign policy theories with in-depth historical and contemporary case study analysis, an approach particularly suited for the critical and contextual inquiry expected of Master's students in arts and humanities at an Islamic university. The methodology is structured to first deconstruct established theoretical frameworks—realism, liberalism, constructivism, post-colonialism, and new security studies—to build a pluralistic analytical lens through which the concept of 'strategic resilience' is examined. This theoretical foundation is then applied to a paradigmatic historical case, the Ottoman integration of Arab provinces, to draw lessons on imperial-local cooperation and legitimacy, a choice of case study that directly resonates with the students' civilizational and academic context. Subsequently, the analysis tests these insights against two pressing contemporary crises, the South China Sea tensions and the Russia-Ukraine war, to understand their practical manifestations and impacts on the Global South.

The method ensures a robust, multi-layered discussion by systematically triangulating theoretical discourse, historical precedent, and contemporary evidence, culminating in the proposal of coherent, context-sensitive policy strategies for enhancing autonomy and ensuring peace, bridging rigorous academic analysis with pragmatic policy formulation. This structured qualitative approach is well-supported by established methodological texts, such as Creswell & Poth (2018), which advocates for the richness and depth achieved through such a multi-faceted investigative strategy.

Result and Discussion

The Global South – encompassing Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Pacific – is bracing amid epochal shifts in great-power rivalry and global governance. Once largely spectators to rivalries among Western and Eastern blocs, many Global South states now face direct strategic challenges: conflicting superpower agendas, contested maritime claims, and the fallout of the war in Ukraine. These disruptions stress fragile economies and erode trust in international institutions, yet they also create openings to recalibrate alliances and reinforce resilience. In confronting war's costs, a moral and practical imperative emerges:

how can societies devastated by conflict and uncertainty reweave social cohesion and sustain peace?

This study argues that leaders in the South must draw on diverse theoretical perspectives – realism, liberal institutionalism, constructivist norms, post-colonial critique and new security studies – as they synthesise lessons from history and the contemporary crises to craft more sustainable peace and defence architectures. It embeds each theme in international relations and foreign policy theory and illustrates with historical analogies (notably Arab integration under the Ottoman Empire) and contemporary flashpoints (South China Sea, Ukraine). Ultimately, proposing novel strategic policies and guidelines for Global South countries seeking autonomy and stability in a turbulent world.

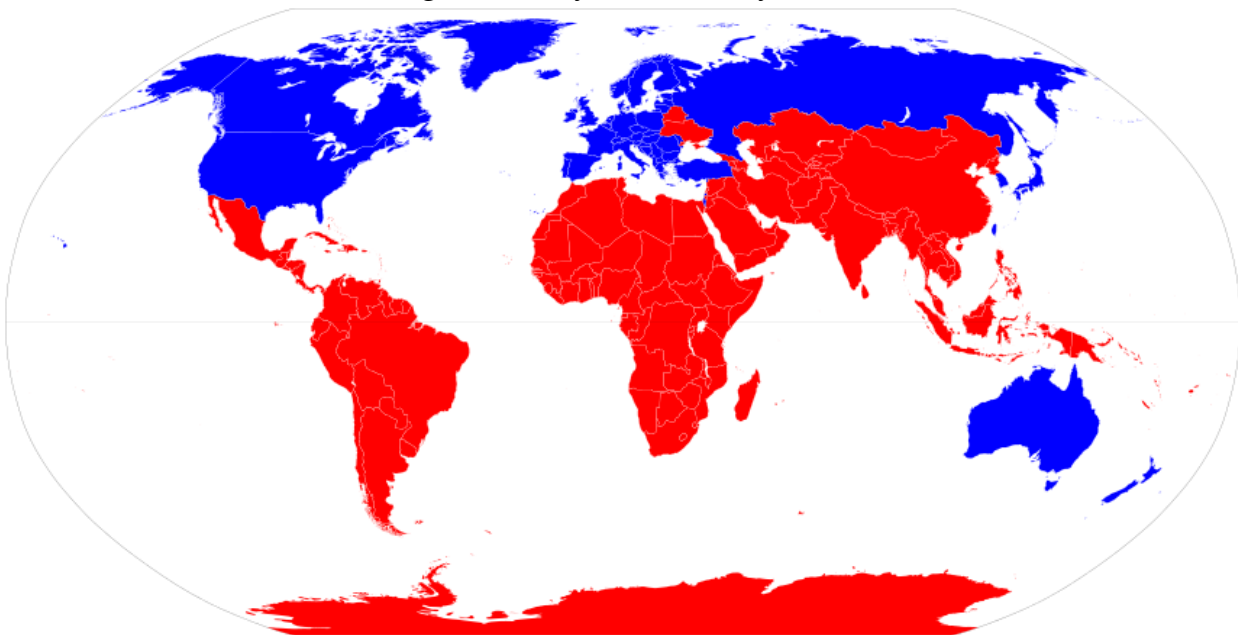


Figure 1: Traditional “Global South” (red) vs “Global North” (blue) world map (public domain). In practice, “Global South” nations (often former colonies or developing states) see global crises differently from Western powers (Wikimedia Commons, 2015)

Many focus on economic welfare and stable development rather than ideological confrontation (Bunte, 2022; Keohane & Nye, 2021). For instance, as Julia Friedrich notes, when Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, Western experts warned of a crisis for the liberal order, but much of the Global South was more preoccupied with war-induced inflation and debt burdens. Diverse political histories and non-alignment traditions have led many of these countries to “hedge” rather than choose sides outright (Friedrich, 2025; Nadkarni et al., 2024; O’Neil & Kurlantzick, 2023).

Theoretical Frameworks on War, Security and Sustainability

International relations theory offers a multifaceted framework for understanding how states in the Global South perceive and respond to strategic crises. An analytically useful strategy for Global South actors, therefore synthesises insights from these traditions—combining prudent deterrence, institutional engagement, narrative

construction, local self-reliance, and comprehensive resilience—rather than adopting any single great-power model wholesale. Moreover, International relations theories each shed light on how Global South countries perceive and respond to strategic crises:

1. **Realism:** States (and powerful sub-state actors) seek security and power in an anarchic world (Britannica, n.d.; Taffer, 2024). A realist perspective emphasises the distribution of power (military, economic, geographic) and predicts that rising powers (like China) will pursue influence, prompting strategic rivalry. Realism underscores that Global South states must be mindful of balancing behaviour – for example, small ASEAN states face a classic security dilemma in the South China Sea, as their actions to secure maritime claims risk provoking China or the US (Taffer, 2024). Realists stress sovereignty and self-help; for Global South governments, this suggests investing in credible deterrence and hedging against reliance on any single patron. Indeed, the post-Ukraine era has underscored realist themes: NATO, for instance, now pledges to raise allied defence spending (to ~5% of GDP by 2035) because the US signals it will “provide much less support in the future” (European Union Institute for Security Studies, n.d.; RAND Corporation, n.d.). The RAND (n.d.) team finds that the Ukraine war mainly reinforced existing power alignments (strengthening US-Europe ties) and incentivised adversaries (Russia, China) to undermine those alliances. Historically, realists note that large wars do not often create new alliances or global orders overnight; rather they harden existing blocs and stimulate states to secure their own survival.
2. **Liberalism:** Liberal theory highlights institutions, interdependence, and norms as peacebuilders (Britannica, n.d.). From this viewpoint, Global South countries benefit from trade, multilateral regimes (UN, WTO), and regional bodies (ASEAN, African Union) which reduce incentives for war. Liberals argue that deep economic integration creates 'complex interdependence' – when states' economies and energy needs are intertwined, the cost of conflict rises. For example, Southeast Asian economies are tied to China through trade and investment; even amid South China Sea tensions, ASEAN states have so far restrained themselves due to high economic stakes (SCSSPI, 2022). However, liberalists also recognise failures: the “slow-moving” Code of Conduct in the South China Sea is a byzantine, non-binding mechanism whose delay has worked to China's advantage (as one analysis notes, ASEAN states have made 'little progress' in writing rules). COVID and war have reminded many in the Global South of liberalism's limits: sanctions can hurt emerging markets (energy, food price shocks), and smaller states may resent Western-led orders that seem to ask for sacrifices while exempting themselves. Yet constructive liberal strategies – such as expanding regional security forums and new investment accords – remain crucial paths to sustainable stability.
3. **Constructivism:** Constructivists focus on identities, norms and narratives (Britannica, n.d.; Albukhari, 2024). They remind us that strategic culture shapes how crises are understood. For instance, Chinese leaders conceive the South China Sea not merely as a balance-of-power issue but as a 'core interest' rooted in national identity

and historical claim; framing the struggle accordingly can produce asymmetric responses (as when China pressed the Philippines hard but restrained itself with Vietnam, as Asian experts puzzle over). Likewise, the idea of a 'Global South' identity has been cultivated by some governments as a norm of solidarity – Russia portrays itself as a defender of the 'Global South against the West' and thus taps into historical grievances of colonialism (Friedrich, 2025; Taffer, 2024). Constructivists would urge Global South policymakers to shape new norms: e.g. crafting a narrative of 'equitable multipolarism' that justifies pursuing non-alignment or selective cooperation. Crucially, constructivism reminds us that the meaning of 'peace' and 'autonomy' is historically and culturally mediated, so policies must resonate with local values and memories (e.g. invoking past independence struggles or moral arguments against foreign meddling).

4. **Post-colonialism:** Post-colonial and critical theories highlight how colonial legacies, race and economic dependency distort security affairs. They argue that many Global South regimes remain haunted by imperial patterns – from arbitrary borders to ethnic stratification – and thus view great-power wars with suspicion (often as new ploys to impose dominance). For instance, Africans and Asians may recall how the Cold War turned their lands into proxy battlegrounds; this skepticism feeds into current “non-aligned” stances in the Russia–Ukraine war (Friedrich, 2025). A post-colonial lens underscores that even well-intentioned interventions (e.g. humanitarian or climate security missions) must contend with the history of exploitation. For strategic resilience, this perspective suggests nurturing local self-reliance (in agriculture, manufacturing, energy) and resisting the temptation to outsource security to foreign powers. At the same time, it encourages bridging divides: peacebuilding must address not only state-level conflict but also the inter-communal and socio-economic wounds left by colonial and Cold War exploitation.
5. **New Security Studies:** The 'new' security paradigm broadens the concept of security beyond military threats to include climate change, health pandemics, cyber-attacks and economic shocks. In this view, war and defence policy cannot be disentangled from sustainability. The war in Ukraine has proved this: its global ripple of energy and food shortages is a humanitarian and security crisis (Chatham House, 2022). Likewise, rising sea levels and resource scarcity mean that a drought in one part of the Global South can cascade into conflict in another. New security scholars urge a human-centred approach: investing in social resilience (education, public health, community cohesion) and international solidarities (climate pacts, pandemic partnerships) is as critical as hard military power. For Global South states, this means integrating 'societal resilience' into defence policy – for example, combining anti-piracy patrols with sustainable fishing programmes, or blending border security with refugee support – so that armed forces protect both territory and populations.

Each theory provides insights, such as realism emphasising the importance of power shifts and alliances for survival, liberalism emphasising the role of institutions and trade in

reducing anarchy, constructivism emphasising the impact of ideas and identities on conflict, postcolonialism emphasising historical injustices and indigenous agency, and new security studies emphasising the need to address non-traditional threats. An astute Global South strategy will draw on all these strands, rather than blindly mimicking any single great-power model.

Historical Analogies and Strategic Lessons



Figure 2: Map of Ottoman expansion into Arab lands, underscoring the dual strategy of Caliphal legitimacy and elite incorporation that sustained imperial authority until nationalist pressures and foreign intervention eroded that consensus (Encyclopædia Britannica, n.d.).

History provides several analogies to contemporary strategic resilience. It is necessary to emphasise the case of Arab provinces under Ottoman rule (1516–1918) as documented by Bruce Masters (2013). The Ottomans annexed much of the Middle East by the early 16th century and maintained nominal sovereignty for four centuries, largely through a combination of religious legitimacy and elite co-optation. Ottoman sultans cast themselves as *protectors of the Holy Cities (Mecca, Medina)* and champions of Sunni Islam, linking their rule to Arab religious identities. In turn, many Arab notables (the *ayan* class) and ulama identified their own fortunes with the empire. As Masters notes, a small number of local families and religious scholars “identified with the Ottoman sultanate” and became its firmest backers (Albukhari, 2024; Masters, 2001). These elites administered towns and tax farms, and in return benefited from security and prestige. Thus Ottoman governance

combined central power with significant local autonomy – an imperial-civilizational synthesis – which fostered a degree of stability and shared interest for centuries.

Importantly, this integration was *collaborative*, not purely coercive. The Ottoman system exploited all subjects (*re'aya*) for taxes, but it also made Arab leaders stakeholders in the regime (Albukhari, 2024). Generations of Sunni scholars even prayed for the empire's success, reflecting how deeply the Ottoman protectorate of Islam was internalised. In strategic terms, the empire leveraged ideology (Caliphate, Sunni unity) and mercantile commerce to bind distant territories. The lesson for today is that strategic resilience can depend on shared narratives and local partnerships. When crises loom (e.g. an invasion of the holy cities in the 19th century), the Ottomans eventually pledged reforms (*Tanzimat*) and local power-sharing to shore up loyalty (Kayali, 2021; Maspul, 2023). These collaborative bonds allowed them to reassert control in much of the Middle East even after near-catastrophes.

However, the Ottoman example also carries cautions. By the 1800s, Arab subjecthood frayed under nationalist pressures and imperial decline. As Masters records, the 19th century 'witnessed the greatest strains on the [Ottoman-Arab] relationship and the potential for rupture'. Ottoman misrule, European encroachment and finally World War I shattered the old order: British and French wartime promises to Arab leaders generated revolt (1916–18), and the empire collapsed by 1924. Trust in the imperial system evaporated when Arabs realised their shared identity with Istanbul was exploited by a foreign bureaucracy, especially as reform faltered. For the Global South, the Ottoman analogy suggests that institutions built on shared values can be durable, but remain vulnerable if legitimacy is lost. When core promises (security, identity, welfare) are seen as broken, alliances unravel quickly. Modern states must therefore invest in inclusive governance and demonstrate real benefits of cohesion, lest they face their own 'Arab Revolts' of popular discontent (Albukhari, 2024; Masters, 2013).

Other historical models enrich this view. The British Empire's approach – often indirect rule via local elites – parallels aspects of the Ottoman case: in India and Africa, colonisers kept existing power structures (princes, chiefs) in place to extract resources. This worked short-term, but bred resentment and fragmented identities. In contrast, **modern strategic models** tend to favour formal alliances (NATO, bilateral treaties) and multilateral fora. It will be presented a comparative table (below) that contrasts key historical models with contemporary counterparts:

Table 1: Comparison of historical strategic integration models and modern security frameworks, highlighting differences and lessons. Historical references: Ottoman Arabia; contemporary sources: international relations theory and current analyses.

Imperial/Traditional Model	Modern Strategic Counterpart	Distinctive Features	Lessons for the Global South
Ottoman integration "Caliphate"	Cultural/Ideational partnerships	Empire held together by ideology (Sunni Islam) and local elites; loyalty	Building resilience via shared identity and elites' buy-in can be effective, but must adapt to new

Imperial/Traditional Model	Modern Counterpart	Strategic	Distinctive Features	Lessons for the Global South
<i>Legitimacy via religion; co-opted local notables (Albukhari, 2024)</i>	<i>e.g. coalitions, diplomacy</i>	<i>Soft-power religious</i>	based on spiritual authority.	values (e.g. secular nationalism); avoid coercion that alienates.
British colonialism <i>Indirect rule through indigenous structures</i>	Security <i>Formal interoperability</i>	Alliances (e.g. NATO, ANZUS) <i>treaties,</i>	Authority maintained by treaties and bases; emphasis on defence technology and collective security.	Alliances boost deterrence but risk dependency; Global South states should diversify partners and develop their own capabilities to avoid being mere 'outposts'.
Civilizational concept <i>Historic empires (e.g. Chinese tributary system)</i>	Global Order/Norms (UN, WTO) <i>International law, norms-based order</i>		Hierarchy justified by civilisational ideology vs. rules-based equal footing.	Emphasise inclusive norms rather than defaulting to hierarchical models; push for reforms (e.g. UN Security Council) so Global South voices are heard.
Bipolar Cold War blocs (NATO vs Warsaw Pact)	Multipolar diplomacy/Non-alignment <i>BRICS, SCO, ASEAN centrality</i>		Formerly two opposing camps; now multiple poles with issue-based coalitions.	Exploit multipolarity: pursue flexible, issue-by-issue alignments; leverage competition between great powers to extract concessions and technical aid.

These comparisons underline that no single model fits the 21st century. For example, the Ottoman and British cases both used local intermediaries – a tactic still echoed when modern powers build 'military basing rights' agreements. But today’s Global South states, with Internet-connected societies, cannot be ruled indirectly as easily; they demand voice and economic partnership. Similarly, whereas the Concert of Europe after 1815 institutionalised great-power rules (Congress of Vienna), modern multilateralism is messier and often gridlocked (e.g. UN Security Council paralysis). The key lesson: Global South resilience will come from hybridising the best lessons (strategic autonomy, flexible coalitions, inclusive governance) rather than mimicking any single empire.

South China Sea Tensions

China’s assertive posture in the South China Sea (SCS) is a live test of strategic trust and stability in Asia. It's necessary to embed a map for reference:



Figure 3: The South China Sea region (highlighting key features). Territorial claims overlap, making the waters a flashpoint of China's growing maritime power and ASEAN's security dilemma (Encyclopædia Britannica, n.d.).

In recent years, China has militarised artificial islands and harassed smaller claimants, claiming historical rights via the 'nine-dash line'. Realists note that Beijing is exploiting its naval buildup to alter the regional balance, banking on US distraction (by Ukraine, for example). Liberalists counter that East Asian states remain economically interdependent: China's GDP is closely tied to ASEAN and Japan, which may deter outright conflict. Constructivists point out that China's national narrative (reclaiming lost territory) fuels public pressure for assertiveness. Meanwhile, post-colonial perspectives remind us that many Asian states gained independence during the Cold War; nationalism is still a potent force, and there is ambivalence toward Western military guarantees. New security

thinkers highlight non-military issues (e.g. fisheries, climate, and lawfare) now entwined with SCS disputes.

A recent analysis by Andrew Taffer (*War on the Rocks*, 2024) illustrates China's calibrated approach: "Tensions between China and the Philippines have escalated dramatically... around Second Thomas Shoal," with Chinese coast guard ships blocking Philippine resupply and injuring sailors. Paradoxically, China has shown restraint toward Vietnam, despite Vietnam's far more extensive land reclamation (Taffer, 2024). Taffer observes that traditional deterrents failed: alliances alone did not protect the Philippines – indeed, the US-Philippines treaty did not prevent coercion. He concludes that China sees Vietnam's non-alignment as making Hanoi willing to impose costs on China, whereas Manila's U.S. ties ironically limited the Philippines' own bargaining space. In sum, China's strategy seems to be 'drive wedges' by punishing one ally while leaving non-aligned neighbours unsettled (Taffer, 2024).

For Global South resilience, the SCS case shows that small states cannot rely solely on top-down security guarantees. They must build local capabilities (e.g. the Philippines enhancing its navy, Vietnam pursuing intelligence-sharing with ASEAN and Quad partners) and strengthen regional trust mechanisms. Notably, despite weak formal institutions, China and ASEAN did eventually sign a non-binding Declaration on the Conduct of Parties (2002) and have incrementally worked on a Code of Conduct. Even without forceful enforcement, such diplomacy – reflecting liberalist "confidence-building measures" – has so far prevented a full-scale clash (SCSSPI, 2022).

Furthermore, it suggests a 'shelve disputes, pursue joint development' approach: if littoral states promote resource-sharing (e.g. joint fisheries patrols) and crisis hotlines, they can manage tensions. At the same time, Southeast Asian states are diversifying security ties: Singapore and Indonesia train with both US and Chinese forces, and ASEAN's 'omnibus' approach signals a form of autonomous balancing. The lesson is that in contested zones, strategic resilience comes from networks, not blockading – mixing realism's deterrence with liberal dialogue and trust-building.

The Russia–Ukraine War

The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine since 2022 has created reverberations across the global strategic order, affecting security, economics and diplomacy worldwide. Its immediate causes were clearly realist (power rivalry, sphere of influence), but its consequences have interacted with liberal and constructivist factors too. For Global South countries, the war has been a 'systemic shock' rather than a local matter (Friedrich, 2025; RAND Corporation, n.d.).

1. Energy and Food Security

Ukraine and Russia together supply ~30% of global wheat and a large share of natural gas and fertilisers. War disruptions – blockade of Ukrainian ports, sanctions on Russian oil/gas – have spurred a commodity shock. Chatham House (2022) analysts document how food and fuel prices spiked: "economic sanctions... have

caused prices of commodities to skyrocket". Developing states from Egypt to Lebanon to Pakistan face bread riots and energy poverty as a direct result. This underlines the new security view: traditional war (tanks, missiles) can wreak civilian catastrophe half a world away. It also saps trust: many governments now doubt that the global 'rules-based order' reliably protects their welfare, since sanctions were imposed by Western powers first and foremost.

2. Defence Realignment

Realists expected a blowback: indeed, NATO and the EU have 'surged' defence postures in response. EU officials now push members to coordinate procurement and avoid duplication, and NATO membership has expanded (Sweden, Finland) as the alliance rebuffs Russian aggression. RAND finds that the war's largest strategic effect has been to **weaken Europe–Russia relations** and strengthen the US–Europe partnership (Friedrich, 2025; European Union Institute for Security Studies, n.d.). Yet liberal institutionalism is strained: the United Nations Security Council is deadlocked by Russia's veto, and many Global South governments see sanctions as Western economic coercion. Constructivist factors also emerged: Russia and China have used the conflict to promote a "counter-West" narrative and highlight historical grievances, appealing to non-aligned states.

For domestic resilience, Global South states observe Ukraine's mobilisation drive – and many conclude that defence cannot be entirely imported. A 2023 Bruegel report notes how even traditional US allies are now building local arms industries and stockpiling ammo for emergencies. The message is clear: strategic autonomy in defence matters. Militarily, some Global South countries (e.g. India, China, Turkey) have already showcased indigenously designed drones and cyber-defences, learning from the Ukraine war's new tactics. Politically, leaders such as India's PM Modi have pushed for greater South–South consultation (e.g. convening the G20 in 2023) to ensure that future crises consider non-Western perspectives (The Economic Times, 2023).

3. Multilateral Diplomacy and Trust

The war has tested global governance. On one hand, the UN General Assembly condemned aggression and briefly rallied many states (73% voted for Ukraine's territorial integrity in 2022). But on the other hand, the majority of the Global South abstained or stayed neutral, frustrated by double standards (some argued that Western invasions in 2003 or support for regime change in Libya were ignored). As GPPI notes, "Western... attempts to engage key non-Western powers... have so far proven largely unsuccessful" (Friedrich, 2025). In practical terms, this means that international institutions – UN, IMF, WTO – face credibility gaps. For resilience, Global South states may therefore invest in *alternative forums* (like the BRICS New Development Bank, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, or an expanded G77) where their voices carry more weight.

They may also push hard for reforms: for instance, advocating that sustainable development funds, climate financing and UN peacekeeping be redesigned with

non-Western leadership roles. Philosophically, this situation raises ethical questions: is the world entering a “might makes right” era, or can norms of *jus ad bellum* (just war) and R2P (Responsibility to Protect) be adapted to include Global South voices? A resilient Global South strategy would involve not just complaining about hypocrisy, but actively recasting international justice concepts in more egalitarian terms.

Strategic Autonomy and Sustainable Peacebuilding

The disruptions wrought by great-power competition and transnational shocks present an opportunity for Global South states to consolidate sovereignty and advance durable peace through a coherent set of strategic principles. Moreover, how should Global South countries harness these disruptions to fortify their sovereignty and peace? Drawing from the above analyses, the following strategic principles and policy directions:

1. **Strategic Autonomy and Defence Self-Reliance:** Countries should reduce singular dependency on any one great power. This means building indigenous defence industries (even modestly – e.g. local armoured vehicle production, drones, cyber units) and stockpiling critical supplies (fuel, semiconductors). Regional defence cooperation is key: for example, African states might revive and expand the African Standby Force, pooling rapid-reaction brigades for local crises, while Southeast Asian nations could deepen ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meetings with joint exercises. Diversification also means hedging: a country like the Philippines simultaneously consults the US, Japan, Australia and Vietnam on SCS matters, giving China less leverage.
2. **Economic and Energy Resilience:** Global South economies must buttress themselves against external shocks. This requires *supply-chain resilience*: investing in alternative trade routes and local value chains so that a distant war or sanction does not cripple domestic manufacturing. Critically, accelerate the clean energy transition: dependence on imported oil/gas (whether from Russia, the Gulf or elsewhere) is a strategic weakness. Developing renewables and regional electricity systems, such as cross-border solar or hydroelectric projects, can mitigate the risk of pipeline wars and price spikes. On food security, support for smallholder agriculture and reserve buffers (e.g. strategic grain stocks) would prevent humanitarian crises from meteorological or conflict-driven shortages.
3. **Innovative Alliances and Forums:** Traditional 'hard' alliances are less viable if great powers become unreliable. Instead, propose *ad hoc coalitions* around shared challenges: for example, a 'Non-Aligned Cybersecurity Forum' or a 'Development-Security Partnership' for the Global South, in which any state can join based on issues rather than ideology. Similarly, Global South countries should strengthen South–South diplomacy: platforms like the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) or the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) should incorporate strategic dialogues. In practice, it has already seen some initiatives: e.g. the 2024 Summit on Peace in Ukraine included many Global South leaders,

recognising that peace in Europe has global stakes. Institutionalising such dialogues – perhaps a permanent 'Global South Peace Council' under the UN's auspices – could build trust and create collective bargaining power.

4. **Inclusive Peacebuilding and Ethical Security:** Beyond military and economic measures, resilience relies on social cohesion and legitimacy at home. Governments should invest in public education and dialogue about the causes and consequences of conflicts, and ensure that conscription or defence policies are accompanied by broad civic support. Programs like community emergency drills, multi-faith peacemaking commissions, and veteran reintegration schemes build the home front. Ethically, policymakers must also reflect on the costs of war: just-war criteria (just cause, proportional means) should be internalised into defence policies. For instance, if deploying peacekeepers or intervening in regional conflicts, there should be transparent legal frameworks (parliamentary debates, UN mandates) to maintain both domestic and international trust. Climate and human security should be woven into defence planning: armies might train for disaster relief, or militaries might reduce carbon footprints, reflecting 'sustainable defence' thinking. Such measures not only reduce future threats (like climate refugees) but improve moral standing – a currency of trust in international relations.
5. **Technological and Normative Innovation:** The wars and tensions of the 21st century are partly driven by new domains (cyber, space, AI). Global South states should join technology alliances (e.g. space observation, cybersecurity sharing networks) as equal partners. For example, India's space program shared satellite data with flood-affected neighbours; similarly, South Africa and Brazil are collaborating on vaccine production (lessons from the pandemic). On norms, the Global South can propose visionary principles: e.g. a 'Green Peace Charter' that links disarmament with development funding, or an agreed code of conduct in cyber warfare. Taking effort in norm-setting allows these countries to shape the trust architecture rather than being passive recipients.

The following policy proposals translate strategic principles into actionable measures designed to enhance collective resilience and preserve sovereignty across the Global South:

1. **Regional Security Initiatives:** Launch pilot projects for joint security in volatile areas. For instance, South Asian states could establish an 'Indian Ocean Security Council' to coordinate anti-piracy and marine conservation, blending military and civilian efforts. Similarly, promote an 'African Coastal Defence Initiative' where littoral nations pool surveillance assets (drones, radars) against transnational threats (trafficking, maritime terrorism). These build capacity and trust among neighbours.
2. **Strategic Stockpiles and Sharing:** Create a Global South consortium to maintain emergency reserves of critical goods (grain, vaccines, energy fuel). Analogous to the IAEA nuclear fuel bank, a 'Strategic Reserves Fund' (perhaps under New Development Bank auspices) would loan supplies to members hit by sanctions or

blockades. This reduces the leverage of geopolitical blackmail and demonstrates solidarity.

3. **Joint Defence Production:** Encourage trilateral and multilateral defence production pacts. Example: an 'ASEAN+' project where Indonesia, Malaysia and Australia co-develop Coast Guard vessels suited to archipelagic needs, sharing technology and costs. In Africa, West African states might jointly procure peacekeeping vehicles, insulating themselves from Western export controls. Pooling orders avoids wasteful duplication and helps local industries achieve economies of scale.
4. **Inclusive Diplomatic Cadres:** Strengthen civil society and diaspora diplomacy networks. Peace and security should not be top-down alone. Proposals include scholarships for Global South diplomats in multilateral affairs and platforms where former non-aligned movement leaders advise on current crises. Engaging NGOs and think-tanks across developing regions creates a 'track II' dialogue that sustains trust even when official channels stall.

Each of these recommendations follows the theoretical insights: realism's emphasis on capabilities (stockpiles, local production), liberalism's embrace of institutions (regional councils, reserve funds), constructivism's focus on shared identity (South-South solidarity), and ethical imperatives (human security in stockpiles, civilian roles in diplomacy).

Conclusion

The Global South finds itself at a strategic crossroads. Recent shocks – rising Chinese maritime assertiveness, the Ukraine war – have exposed vulnerabilities in the existing security order. But they have also underscored the agency of Global South states. These countries can develop pragmatic and principled resilience measures by learning from history (Ottoman, colonial, and Cold War examples) and using a pluralistic international relations framework. The path forward is not isolation; it is creative engagement on their own terms. In the words of a Vietnamese analyst on the South China Sea: even without a binding multilateral pact, “peace and stability... serve the interests of all parties”. Harnessing that mutual interest – while rectifying structural inequities in global governance – is the heart of sustainable resilience. Our analysis shows that by diversifying alliances, strengthening institutions, and investing in home-grown stability, the Global South can transform current turbulences into opportunities for lasting autonomy and peace.

Moreover, a focused, collaborative research and policy agenda is recommended: commission short, policy-relevant trials of blended, low-bandwidth and phone-first delivery models to identify scalable pedagogies; evaluate teacher-training innovations (micro-credentials, in-residence coaching) for measurable impacts on retention and engagement; pilot community learning hubs and strategic reserve mechanisms to strengthen emergency readiness; and institutionalise South–South knowledge exchanges and pooled financing mechanisms to sustain distance-learning as a public good.

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